

CWMDONKIN PARK

Ref number	PGW (Gm) 48 (SWA)
OS Map	159
Grid ref	SS 637 932
Former county	West Glamorgan
Unitary authority	City and County of Swansea
Community council	Uplands
Designations	Conservation Area: Ffynone
Site evaluation	Grade II
Primary reasons for grading	A well preserved Victorian urban public park, which retains much of its original layout. The park contains some good planting of ornamental trees and shrubs.
Type of site	Urban public park
Main phases of construction	1874

Site description

Cwmdonkin Park is a medium-sized urban public park of 13 acres, situated in a residential area of Swansea, to the west of the city centre. It is elongated east-west and lies on a south-facing slope, the northern end steeply sloping down to a more level central area. It is bounded by Terrace Road on the north and west, Cwmdonkin Drive on the east and private gardens on the south. The park is largely informal in character, with areas of ornamental tree and shrub planting, open lawn, and sports facilities.

At the northern end of the park a steep grass slope drops down from the boundary bank and hawthorn hedge on Terrace Road. The slope is planted with many evergreen oaks, beeches and acers, with a belt of rhododendrons on the boundary and a stand of cypresses. A tarmac path winds down the slope from an entrance near the east end of the north side. In places the original surfacing of cobbles with stone edging is visible. Half way along a path branches off to the north and leads to a flight of concrete steps up to a pedestrian entrance gate flanked by concrete walls. Paths branch off the main one, two of them leading to a circular path, on the lower part of the slope, around a stand of *Trachycarpus fortunei* and four walnut trees underplanted with phormiums. Towards the west end of the park the main path leading down the slope curves around, flanked on its outer side by low railings and five large yews, with a steep bank below to a sloping lawn with flowerbeds cut in it. Old postcards show the beds full of colourful bedding plants. All paths lead to a straight, axial tarmac path running west-north-west/east-south-east across the full length of the park. The bottom of the slope is planted with mixed trees, including firs and a monkey puzzle.

At the west end of the park there are horse chestnuts and a large sycamore on the boundary. A house in the north-west corner has a laurel hedge and a huge cherry tree in front of it. Next to it is a park entrance consisting of two simple square stone piers flanked by iron railings, which continue on a boundary bank to the west. To the west of the entrance is a gothic pedestrian archway of dressed stone blocks. To its north is a short stretch of lower stone wall. The archway leads to a narrow path with a crushed shell surface and stone edging. This leads through an area of mixed woodland, predominantly horse chestnuts with rhododendron underplanting. A modern handrail has been installed for safety on the lower side of the path. The path branches, one branch leading to an entrance in the south-west corner of the park.

The wide axial path is flanked first (starting at the west end) by a grass area planted with young ornamental trees on the south and then by cypresses and yews. Next, to the north is the sloping lawn with circular and square rosebeds cut into it. Opposite this are hard tennis courts, with a discontinuous cypress hedge along their west side and a pavilion to their east. This is a single-storey rendered building, with pitched, red-tiled roof, half-timbered gable ends and verandahs on all sides, supported by wooden uprights. To its south is a bowling green. This has a tarmac path and seats around it and is bounded on the east by a hedge of *Griselinia littoralis*. On the south side the ground drops to the path along the south boundary of the park. To the east of the bowling green, south of the axial path, is an area of water gardens. This was landscaped in 1974 to commemorate the centenary of the park. It is centred on a stone-lined rill which runs southwards over a cascade into a small informal pond. Planting around it is mixed, but features ornamental shrubs and moisture-loving plants. On its east side is a small level lawn planted with young ornamental trees and evergreen oak, with a modern wishing well on its west side. The area is bounded on the east by a cypress hedge. A bandstand originally stood in this area.

The axial path continues eastwards, flanked by mixed trees, to just short of the east boundary of the park, where it is blocked off.

To the south of the axial path (starting at the west end) a curving path runs along the west and south sides of the lawn planted with young trees. On the south side a privet hedge hides a maintenance area and then the path is flanked on the south by a mixed shrub border backed by a high stone wall. Trees here include a large tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), oak, ash and holly. Uncut stone steps on the north side lead to a small triangular lawn to the east of the bowling green, planted with a large lime and a magnolia. The path leads to a cross path running north up the west side of the water gardens to the east-west axial path and to an entrance at the north end of Park Drive. This is flanked by square piers of dressed stone blocks, with pyramidal tops. Flanking curving stone walls end in similar piers. Iron railings bound the park to the south of the easternmost pier. To the west is a brick wall. To the east of Park Drive is a sloping lawn with rectangular beds cut out of it. The lawn is planted with Chusan palms (*Trachycarpus fortunei*) and flowering cherries. The lawn is bounded by straight tarmac paths, with a cypress hedge along the east side and a stone wall and modern railings on the south side. At the north end is a large beech tree.

The main open area of the park lies at the east end, to the south of the axial path. This is a large level lawn on the north side of which the ground rises and is planted with evergreen oaks. Behind, on the rising ground, are mixed trees, including evergreen oak, with birch, fir, pine and a large monkey puzzle to the west. Trees, including cypress, yew and oak, are planted along the west side. On the south side is a steep bank, with paths leading to an exit gate. The bank is planted with birches and

pinetrees. On the east boundary is a rubble stone wall, behind which is a modern housing development. On the edge of the lawn, on the north side, is a modern shelter, the Dylan Thomas Memorial Shelter. It is a small building, open at the front, with a three-sided back wall supporting a triangular wooden roof. It is floored with a brick platform bounded by shallow steps.

The park was laid out on land bought from Mr James Walter for £4,650 in 1874. It was then on the western edge of Swansea. The area was little developed at the time, with a few larger houses - Uplands, Bryn-briallu, Cefn-eithin, Pen-y-lan and Rosehill around it, a rifle range on the moorland to the north and the Swansea Water-Works reservoir, opened as a public park (later called Brynmill Park) in 1872, in the south-east corner. £2,251 was spent on the landscaping of the park. Its layout is shown on the 1878 Ordnance Survey map. It was informal and most of the original paths survive today, although their surfaces, with the exception of the crushed shell paths, have been replaced by tarmac. A path ran all the way around the reservoir, which was treated as an ornamental feature. Planting was similarly informal, with boundary tree and shrub belts and borders, an area of woodland in the centre of the south side, and the beginnings of the wooded bank along the north side. The tennis courts, pavilion, bandstand and bowling green were later additions, the bowling green being built in 1908. The bandstand, now gone, was an octagonal building with rustic woodwork around the top of the open sides. It stood in a lawn, with a gravel path around it. The narrow winding paths at the west end of the park are shown on the 1878 Ordnance Survey map, but the wall and archway were subsequent additions as they are not. The park was much loved by the poet Dylan Thomas, whose poem 'The hunchback in the park' was written about Cwmdonkin.

The most important change since the beginning of the twentieth century has been the filling in of the reservoir. This became Swansea's second reservoir in 1852. Between the First and Second World Wars it became overgrown; it was used for firefighting in the Second World War, but afterwards its railings were broken and it was drained. During the 1950s the hole, which had become an eyesore, was filled in with building rubble from wartime bombing and finally in 1974 the site was landscaped as a play area. Other alterations include the removal of a building on the north side of the park, the addition of the water gardens in 1974 and the building of the shelter.

Sources

Primary

Documents relating to the park: West Glamorgan Record Office D/D RMD 1/22.
Old postcards of the park: private collection.